

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE MARKUP

H.R. 3101, THE 21ST CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS AND VIDEO ACCESSIBILITY ACT

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JULY 21, 2010

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Good morning. Today the Committee marks up, among other things, a measure introduced by our colleague Mr. Markey that seeks to update the laws governing access to communications services by individuals with disabilities.

This Monday marks the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is a significant milestone, and we have come a long way in the two decades since 1990.

We have also seen significant technological change since Congress enacted the ADA, including the emergence of the Internet as a core communications infrastructure; the daily use by many Americans of email, text messaging and video conferencing both at home and at work; and increasing use of the Internet to view video programming.

It is therefore timely to update our communications laws to ensure that new technologies are accessible to individuals with visual or hearing impairments.

As we learned at a legislative hearing before the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet on this measure last this month, there are close to one million Americans who have severe or profound hearing loss and more than one million who are legally blind. Four percent of our population has great difficulty hearing, and an additional three percent are visually impaired.

Moreover, as much as some of us might not want to admit it, Americans are aging. There are approximately 40 million people over the age of 65 living in the United States today, or 13 percent of the population. One estimate shows that by 2050, that number will more than double to 88.5 million, or an estimated one-fifth of the population. Naturally, this growth will be accompanied by an increase in the number of Americans who are vision or hearing-impaired and who will need accessible communications products and services.

With the explosion in Internet-delivered services, both the variety of information and entertainment offerings and the complexity and variety of the devices that receive those services have multiplied. Our challenge is to assure that all Americans can benefit from those advances, including individuals with vision or hearing impairments.

I appreciate all of the stakeholders who have been working diligently with myself, Chairman Waxman, Mr. Markey, Ranking Members Barton and Stearns and our staffs on a constant and bipartisan basis to reach consensus on revisions to H.R. 3101.

I am also pleased that the amendment in the nature of a substitute that I will offer later this morning will make a number of changes that enhance the measure's flexibility, while ensuring that advanced communications services will be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for including this important measure in today's markup. I look forward to our continued work together on a bipartisan basis to promote accessibility and innovation as we bring this important legislation to the House floor next week.